

# SAFETY MESSAGE

## Your Personal Safety is our #1 priority

### Safe Lifting Practices

#### Back Basics

##### Back stress

You may know that back injuries are the most common type of industrial accident. That is because no matter what our jobs, we are constantly using our backs: to support our bodies, to bend, to sit, to stand, even to lie down.

All of these activities put stress on our backs. But, at no time are our backs more vulnerable to injury than when we are lifting.

Understanding how your back works while lifting can help avoid unnecessary strain and potential injury.

##### Anatomy

Your back is made up of movable bones (called vertebrae) and shock absorbers (called discs) between each vertebra. These structures are supported by ligaments and muscles that help keep the back aligned in three balanced curves.

Your back is aligned correctly when your ears, shoulders, and hips are in a straight line. When your back's three curves are not in balance, there is greater likelihood of both back pain and injury.

#### Lifting

##### Lifting mechanics

When you lift, it is important to keep your back in balance. If you bend at your waist and extend your upper body to lift an object, you upset your back's alignment and your center of balance.

You force your back to support the weight of your body and the weight of the object you are lifting. This situation is called "overload."

You can avoid overloading your back by using good lifting techniques. For example, when you bend at the knees and hug the object close to you as you lift, you keep your back in alignment and let the stronger muscles in your thighs do the actual "lifting." You do not have to extend your upper body and are able to maintain your center of balance.

##### Safe lifting

Safe lifting means protecting your back (and yourself) while you lift. Before lifting anything, think about the lift. Can you lift it alone? Do you need help? Is the load too big or too awkward?

When you do lift, be sure to bend at the knees, hug the load close to your body, and raise yourself up with the strong muscles in your thighs.

Remember never twist while lifting. Instead, move one foot at a time in

the direction you want to go and then turn with your leg muscles.

Above all, safe lifting means keeping your back in balance and avoiding overload. When you know how your back works, it is easier to understand how you can protect it.

### **Prevention is easy**

Do you know that the most common work injury is also the one you can most easily prevent? Injuries to the lower back affect half the nation's work force at some time during their working lives.

You may think you're in a job that is not prone to back injuries, but take a second look. If your job involves any lifting, you could be at risk. Back injuries usually result from mistakes made in lifting things.

The good news is that you can take steps to avoid becoming a statistic, even without the help of special equipment or company programs.

### **Before you lift**

Before you pick up that carton or load, ask yourself these questions:

- Is this too heavy for me to lift and carry alone?
- How high do I have to lift it?
- Will this lifting be a regular part of my job?
- Am I trying to impress anyone by lifting this?

### **Lift correctly**

If a load weighs more than 25 pounds, follow these recommended steps for lifting it:

1. Position your feet properly. One foot goes next to the load and one goes behind it.
2. Squat down keeping your head erect and your back straight.
3. Grip the load using your full palm. Fingers alone are too weak.
4. Draw the load close to your body and keep your elbows and arms near you. Center your body weight over your feet, then start lifting with a thrust of your leg.
5. If you must turn, don't twist your body. Point your foot in the direction you're turning.

## **Prevent Back Problems**

### **Preventive action**

If your job involves lifting, a physical-conditioning program could help avoid back injury. Your company may offer one or you can get into shape on your own at home.

Stretching exercises are important because they help prevent injuries that come from sudden jerking of muscles that are too tight. Running, swimming, aerobics, and weight training all increase strength and stamina.

The signs of a backbreaking task are easy to spot: frequent accidents, complaints about the task, low production, abnormally high levels of

## **Ergonomic solutions**

scrap. You don't have to look very hard to discover them.

The science of ergonomics studies ways to make workers more comfortable with the machines and materials they use in the workplace.

It involves redesigning workstations and the ways jobs are performed so that workers can get more done with less effort.

A typical ergonomic solution might be to tilt bins and large cartons so that workers can remove materials from them without bending. Another solution might be to install a mechanical lifting aid or change the height of a shelf, chair, or table.

Ergonomic changes attempt to reduce potential dangers and make jobs less stressful. Such redesign of manual tasks has been known to reduce industrial back injuries substantially.

## **Simple cures**

Fortunately, there are many simple ways to design the problem out of backbreaking tasks. For example:

- Try to rearrange the space to avoid doing a lot of lifting and twisting. People who have to twist under a load are more likely to suffer back injury.
- Rotate jobs so those periods of standing, alternate with moving or sitting. Ask for stools or footrests for stationary jobs.
- Store materials at knee level whenever possible. Make shelves shallower. Break up loads.
- If you must carry a heavy object some distance to your workstation, consider storing it closer, request a table to rest it on, or try to use a hand truck to transport it.

## **Stretch breaks**

Most workers' compensation injuries occur during the first few hours of work, when muscles are cold and tight. Most of these problems are garden-variety back pain caused by a lack of flexibility and strength.

For this reason, a number of companies are now offering workers stretch breaks to warm up muscles and improve flexibility. Stretching for just eight minutes before work has reduced worker sprains and strains by as much as 40% at some companies.

Many companies are going a step further and encouraging employees to be more physically active away from the workplace. A lifetime commitment to a simple bending-and-stretching routine, practiced just a few days a week, greatly reduces the risk of back injury.